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ELEVEN

In Search of Human Rights: The Paekchŏng Movement in Colonial Korea

Joong-Seop Kim

The advent of “modern society” and the struggle toward modernization in Korea began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as diverse influences, both internal and external, came to bear on the peninsula. Next to Japanese colonialism, the most powerful and enduring force was Western culture and ideology, including both socialism and liberalism, whose penetration of Korea predates the colonial era. In addition, internal developments such as the Tonghak peasant rebellions of 1894, the Kabo Reform movement of 1894–96, and the Independence Club of the early 1900s shaped Korea’s transition to modernity. Accordingly, each must be considered in explaining Korea’s approach to the modern world.

Deserving of particularly close attention is the historical coincidence that Korean modernization took place under colonial rule. Japan, as the main channel of Korean contact with foreign culture, provided opportunities for Korea’s advent to modernity. Yet, Japanese colonialism disrupted and even discouraged Korean modernization through harsh authoritarian repression, and the Korean resistance to colonialism determined the course of social development during the period.

The double-edged nature of colonial modernity, its enabling and constraining effects, is evident in social movements. Although Japanese colonialism repressed every anticolonial, nationalist movement, it also facilitated “modern” social movements organized around issues of gender and class (for a study of women’s movements during the colonial period, see Chapter 7, by Kenneth M. Wells, in this volume). This chapter studies colonial modernity by examining the liberation movement of the *paekchǒng*. After centuries of discrimination and repression during the Chosŏn dynasty (1392–1910), this group of hereditary outcastes formed the Hyŏngp’yŏngsa (Equity society) in 1923, which lasted more than a decade. The *hyŏngp’yŏng* (equity) movement proclaimed as its primary aims and purposes the abolition of the traditional bondage of the *paekchǒng*, their liberation from repression and social discrimination, and above all, the universalization of equal rights and dignity within an egalitarian society. The Hyŏngp’yŏngsa was a human rights movement and derived the notion of liberation from its conception of modern society, in which the rights of citizens as equal members of the society are realized through the institutionalization of practices in the social and political spheres.¹

The history of the Hyŏngp’yŏngsa clearly illustrates the transition from tradition to modernity in Korea, as well as the social experience of colonial rule and its effects. Although the movement has received little attention from scholars until recently, a close examination of this human rights movement will help to unveil the complex relations between colonialism and modernity in Korea.

Historical Background of the *Paekchǒng*

The *paekchǒng* occupied the lowest rung in traditional Chosŏn society. A stigmatized minority, comparable to the “untouchables” in India or the *burakumin* in Japan,² they were regarded as inferior even by low-status slaves and *kisaeng* (female entertainers). Therefore, the appellation “*paekchǒng*” conveyed contempt and reflected the rigid hierarchical structure of the traditional *sinbun* (hereditary status) system in Chosŏn Korea. The origins of the *paekchǒng* and the reasons for their degradation before and throughout the Chosŏn period remain largely unknown, but it is indisputable that they were severely discriminated against by ordinary people throughout the Chosŏn period.³

The *paekchǒng* suffered from numerous discriminatory restrictions. They could not live in the villages of ordinary people. They had to observe strict restrictions on decorations and ornaments. For example, the use of roofing tiles was forbidden, as was the wearing of ordinary hats and clothes. Their behavior was to be extremely modest and to show utmost humility. This humiliation and segregation extended even to their wedding and funeral services and burial sites. Social discriminations against *paekchǒng* ranged from the Chinese characters permitted for use as names to the social actions required in everyday life. The names of *paekchǒng* could include no Chinese characters with noble meanings, only degrading ones. Self-derogation was necessary in their conversation and personal interactions. The status forms of the Korean language further confirmed their inferiority: regardless of age, the *paekchǒng* were obliged to address ordinary people in honorific forms and to use humble forms in reference to themselves.

Even into the twentieth century, the *paekchǒng* continued to be stigmatized, unlike other despised groups such as slaves. However, new social and ideological forces at the turn of the century began to transform the *paekchǒng*. In particular, two channels introduced the *paekchǒng* to human rights concepts and subsequently encouraged them to organize and mobilize in defense of their interests—the indigenous religion, Tonghak, and a foreign faith, Christianity.

Religious leaders of the Tonghak (a coinage meaning “Eastern learning” adopted to contrast the movement with Christianity’s “Western learning”) focused on the abolition of unjust *sinbun* conventions.⁴ During the 1894 peasant uprisings, rebel leaders with Tonghak religious backgrounds championed human rights, particularly for the society’s lowest groups. In a statement calling for social reform by the government, they demanded, among other things, that the *paekchǒng* no longer be required to wear discriminatory hats and that widows be permitted to remarry. Advocating these causes challenged traditional Confucius-based social customs, which legitimized the humiliation of the *paekchǒng* and women. Although the uprisings were defeated, the peasant demands were reflected in governmental initiatives promulgated in the Kabo Reform of 1894–96. The peasant leadership of the revolt and the consequent change in government policy helped topple the *sinbun* structure and liberate most despised groups. Slaves were obvious beneficiaries. Although some progress in their status had occurred since a gov-

ernment proclamation in 1801, only in 1894 were they officially manumitted. The government outlawed slave ownership and the slave trade. Compared with that of slaves, however, the social situation of the *paekchǒng* was less improved. Social convention continued to segregate them from ordinary people in residence and clothing and restrict them to hereditary occupations, such as slaughtering and butchering, perpetuating unjust social practices toward them. Nonetheless, Tonghak ideas and the Kabo Reform, which undermined the social status system, implicitly and explicitly helped the *paekchǒng* recognize the injustice of their social situation.

In addition, the *paekchǒng* encountered egalitarian ideas through Western culture, particularly through Christianity. Unlike Catholic efforts in Korea in the eighteenth century, the Protestant missions of the nineteenth century were rather successful right from the beginning.⁵ Some missionaries developed close contacts with the *paekchǒng*, exposing them to the concepts of human rights and social equality. For example, Samuel F. Moore, an American Presbyterian missionary in a *paekchǒng* village in Seoul, successfully converted a large number of them to Christianity.⁶ Among the converts was the village leader, Pak Sǒngch'un, an impressive speaker at the People's Rally in Seoul organized by the Independence Club in 1898.

However, even though conversion made them equal before God, *paekchǒng* did not become equal in the eyes of other members of Moore's congregation. In 1895 non-*paekchǒng* believers protested Moore's inclusion of *paekchǒng* in worship services. They boycotted services, and some threatened to quit the church altogether. The reluctance of non-*paekchǒng* converts to Christianity, generally regarded as rather progressive by Korean standards, to sit beside *paekchǒng* believers shows how far the *paekchǒng* remained from freedom. A similar incident occurred at a Presbyterian church in Chinju in 1909: the attempt of *paekchǒng* to attend services with other converts met with protest and attack.⁷ The non-*paekchǒng* believers chastised the missionary for being insensitive to Korean customs, and left the congregation in protest. The confrontation obviously undermined Christian preachings of egalitarianism and presumably reinforced traditional hierarchical distinctions as well as social discrimination against the *paekchǒng*. Yet in both cases, the missionaries clearly conveyed to the *paekchǒng* that all people have equal rights under God. Although no direct evidence connects these episodes with the birth of a *paekchǒng* organization, it is conceivable that the

evangelism of missionaries contributed to transformations in concepts of the status of the *paekchǒng*. And exposure to Western egalitarian ideas probably heightened the *paekchǒng*'s desire to participate in society on an equal basis and introduced them to the changing social norms.

Thus, whether from Tonghak or Christianity, the *paekchǒng* were exposed to egalitarian ideas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This exposure paralleled the rapid, uneven, and enormous changes in Korean society, and these also affected the *paekchǒng* in their everyday life.

The *Paekchǒng* in Transition

The dramatic changes permeating Korea in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries inevitably affected the *paekchǒng*'s position in society. They no longer silently tolerated social discrimination and began to protest their situation even before the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa emerged in 1923. In 1900, for example, *paekchǒng* leaders from sixteen counties around Chinju, South Kyōngsang province, presented petitions to the mayor of Chinju seeking permission to wear the same clothes and hats as ordinary people.⁸ In 1901, when government officials in Haeju, Hwanghae province, demanded bribes in return for their emancipation, *paekchǒng* leaders appealed to the central government in Seoul. Similarly, in 1901, when some *paekchǒng* in Yech'ŏn, North Kyōngsang province, were jailed for their refusal to comply with the mayor's order to wear the humiliating traditional garb, Pak Sǒngch'un (thought to be the same person as the speaker at the People's Rally in 1898 mentioned above) responded by bringing a case seeking their release before the government.⁹

Two features of social movements help explain *paekchǒng* activism at this time. First, "social enabling" environments and resources assist people in establishing and sustaining movements.¹⁰ The various experiences discussed above clearly schooled the *paekchǒng* in resource mobilization and collective action. Such events demonstrate how the *paekchǒng* continued to absorb egalitarian ideas that stimulated a desire for a transformation of their status. In addition, the *paekchǒng*'s social environment changed enormously—for example, the strict residential segregation loosened to the point that the *paekchǒng* came into more frequent personal contact with ordinary

people through cohabitation in more open, progressive communities. And a small number of wealthy *paekchǒng* families were able to educate their offspring in private and public schools. Also, the tight *paekchǒng* community network long built up through marriage and occupation proved an asset in organizing and mobilizing resources. Such social environmental factors, outside as well as inside the *paekchǒng* community, unquestionably enhanced their ability to launch the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement.

Second, “social constraints”—the injustices a social movement seeks to redress—were another factor behind *paekchǒng* activism. Social constraints comprise not only externally enforced social conventions but also internalized norms and attendant emotional judgments. That is, structural conditions may encourage or, conversely, strain internal perceptions of oneself and others. The inner conflicts produced by social deprivation and status inconsistency are often studied by sociologists and social psychologists.¹¹ As noted above, despite the official abolition of the *sinbun* hierarchy in the Kabo Reform legislation of 1894, the government continued to discriminate against the *paekchǒng*. For example, on several occasions in the late 1890s the minister of internal affairs ordered lower-ranking officials to punish members of the despised class who displayed a disobedient attitude toward noble people.¹² Such social constraints continued to operate, and the *sinbun* ethic and structure was maintained, into the 1920s. In 1922, the year prior to foundation of the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa, for example, *kisaeng* who accompanied *paekchǒng* on a picnic in Taegu were publicly criticized and then stripped of their guild membership for consorting with *paekchǒng*.¹³ Clearly the *paekchǒng* continued to suffer social discrimination, unlike members of other menial groups such as slaves and craftpersons, against whom discrimination had eased somewhat.

These complex aspects of the modernizing process, that is, the social constraints and enabling that generated the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement, characterized the economic sphere as well. Although still embryonic, industrialization affected and altered the *paekchǒng* community as a whole in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by causing the expansion of urban areas and an enormous reshuffling of the occupational structure.

The *paekchǒng*'s traditional occupations—slaughterers and butchers, tanners and leather workers, wicker craftsmen, and on oc-

casion executioners—had been exclusive and hereditary to them. They consequently held a monopoly over such industries, although these occupations marked them as menial outcasts in both Buddhist Koryŏ and Confucian Chosŏn. However, their monopoly was broken when their occupations became profitable during industrialization. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Chosŏn government and the subsequent Japanese colonial administration passed legislation that brought slaughtering and butchering under close state surveillance.¹⁴ Following the first regulations in 1896, the state gradually eliminated the *paekchǒng*'s monopoly of meat processing. As the meat trade expanded among the burgeoning urban population and became lucrative, increasing numbers of non-*paekchǒng* assumed jobs in the industry. Dominant among them were Japanese residents in Korea, who were encouraged to do so by the Japanese colonial administration.

As a result, *paekchǒng* slaughterers became the employees of Japanese-owned slaughterhouses and worked in conditions largely controlled by the colonial administration and Japanese associations. *Paekchǒng* butchers procured their meat from Japanese-controlled slaughterhouses and became subject to Japanese price and quantity manipulation as well as government surveillance. Once again, the *paekchǒng* seemed to occupy the lowest rung. As shown in Table 11.1, many found work in slaughterhouses and leather factories, and some, deprived of their traditional occupations altogether, became peasants or joined the ranks of the unemployed, even though there were regional variations. As capitalism destroyed the *paekchǒng*'s traditional monopoly, their living conditions deteriorated. Although a fortunate few, particularly in the south, maneuvered themselves into the profitable aspects of the meat industry, such as butchering animals and trading leather products, the unsuccessful adjustment of the great majority brought a sense of crisis to their community. Urbanization and the increased profitability of the packing industry attracted non-*paekchǒng* investors, particularly well-financed and government-backed Japanese entrepreneurs, and the resulting loss of hereditary monopolies brought long-simmering grievances to a head and provoked a crisis of identity. The *hyŏngp'yŏng* movement of the 1920s emerged from this crisis.

Alongside these constraining forces, however, were enabling factors in the economic sphere. These included increasing differentia-

Table 11.1
Population and Occupation Breakdown of Paekch'ong, 1926

Province	a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	Total	%
Kyōnggi	477	25	1,114	176	334	98	168	142	2	0	72	193	439	3,240	8.8%
N. Ch'ung-ch'ong	129	2	870	239	286	32	74	2	8	0	33	41	338	2,054	5.6
S. Ch'ung-ch'ong	237	54	1,592	498	444	109	236	8	52	0	36	144	389	3,799	10.3
N. Ch'olla	289	43	1,557	134	864	156	349	5	29	1	19	153	194	3,793	10.3
S. Ch'olla	556	84	1,309	21	403	99	539	33	11	0	45	82	50	3,232	8.8
N. Kyōngsang	381	156	1,037	681	2,480	136	286	229	77	0	34	529	1,384	7,410	20.2
S. Kyōngsang	239	146	1,005	302	496	134	74	58	61	0	71	44	32	2,662	7.2
Kangw'ŏn	281	3	210	326	787	110	209	4	16	0	11	29	59	2,045	5.6
Hwanghae	232	553	78	674	3,406	189	40	278	26	0	1	211	0	5,688	15.5
N. Py'ongan	505	106	76	229	295	29	80	40	71	0	11	39	1	1,482	4.0
S. Py'ongan	136	0	16	157	283	45	1	0	46	0	3	43	189	919	2.5
N. Hamgyōng	24	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	0.1
S. Hamgyōng	211	3	3	1	47	16	18	12	0	0	2	9	7	329	0.9
Total	3,697	1,175	8,867	3,439	10,125	1,153	2,074	811	399	1	338	1,517	3,082	36,678	100%
%	10.1	3.2	24.1	9.4	27.5	3.1	5.7	2.2	1.1	0	0.9	4.1	8.4	100%	

KEY: a = slaughterer; b = leather worker; c = butcher; d = wicker worker; e = farmer; f = laborer; g = restaurateur; h = leather shoemaker; i = basket maker; j = public servant; k = merchant; l = miscellaneous; m = jobless

SOURCE: Chōsen sōtokufu, Keimukyoku, *Chōsen no chian jōkyō* (1927), p. 2-9-9.

tion of the *paekchǒng* community into haves and have-nots and the concomitant growth of economic resources available for collective activities. Wealthy *paekchǒng*, who despite economic success did not escape their inherited status, were potential resources as members and supporters of the new human rights movement. In particular, *paekchǒng* in the southern region were more successful in adapting to industrialization than their counterparts in the north, and it is no coincidence that the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement started and was most active in the south.

In short, two contrasting forces drove the transformation of the *paekchǒng* in social and economic spheres as industrialization took hold. On the one hand, long-standing social constraints continued to block the liberation of *paekchǒng* from traditional bondage, even as they were deprived of their traditional sources of income. On the other hand, these social changes exposed them to the concept of human rights and equality in modern society. Additionally, those few *paekchǒng* who prospered in the midst of these rapid changes boosted the social and economic resources of the *paekchǒng* community. These dynamic social conditions contributed to the initiation and subsequent activities of the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement for human rights in the 1920s and 1930s.

Toward Social Equality: Development of the *Hyǒngp'yǒng* Movement

The *Hyǒngp'yǒngsa* was not the first attempt to organize the *paekchǒng* in the twentieth century. In 1910, some *paekchǒng* had already sought to organize a national trade union for butchers. To this end, Chang Chip'il, one of the most important founders of the *Hyǒngp'yǒngsa*, tried to convene a gathering of *paekchǒng* leaders from South Kyǒngsang province in Chinju.¹⁵ He was not, however, able to establish an enduring organization, presumably because of hostile reactions from social superiors.¹⁶ The *Chipsǒng Chohap* (Success union), founded in 1921 in Seoul under the leadership of Korean and Japanese entrepreneurs, aimed to provide social-welfare services, mainly for butchers in the Seoul area.¹⁷ The organization did not press a broad human rights agenda on behalf of *paekchǒng* but focused on economic interests. It lasted several years until coming into conflict with the *Hyǒngp'yǒngsa* in the late 1920s.¹⁸

The *Hyǒngp'yǒngsa* was the first organization whose initial and

ongoing purpose was to improve the *paekchǒng*'s human rights. The Hyǒngp'yǒngsa was officially launched in Chinju, South Kyǒngsang province, on April 24, 1923, through the cooperative efforts of well-known non-*paekchǒng* social movement activists and wealthy or educated *paekchǒng* in the Chinju community.¹⁹ For example, Kang Sangho, a key founder, came from a landowner's family and had a relatively advanced education. He had previously been involved in various social activities. His leadership of protests in the Chinju area during the March First movement of 1919, for example, resulted in his detention in prison for one year and his appointment as director of the Chinju office of the *Tonga ilbo*, a nationalist newspaper, in 1920. Among the social associations with which he had been affiliated before the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa were peasant and laborer groups and a committee for establishing a private high school. He was one of many social movement activists within local communities, who, as a group, exerted a major influence over the course of social matters throughout the country after the March First movement.²⁰ Such activists took a significant part in leading the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement.

Among the wealthy *paekchǒng* who helped launch and lead the society was Yi Hakch'an, an influential member of the *paekchǒng* community who owned a large butcher shop at a newly founded marketplace in Chinju. Such wealthy contributors had successfully adjusted economically to the "great transformation" of society, and in some cases had been able to move to residential areas previously closed to them. They still suffered from social prejudice and discrimination at many levels, but, as noted above, their contact with social superiors exacerbated their sense of grievance and consciousness of human rights. Their wealth helped support the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement, at least in its initial organizing process, throughout the country.

A third significant element in the *paekchǒng* community that played a key role in organizing the movement was the rare, educated, intellectual *paekchǒng*. Chang Chip'il, for example, who came from a *paekchǒng* family in Ŭiryǒng, 30 kilometers east of Chinju, had attended Meiji University in Japan.²¹ He had applied for a post at the Government-General Offices in Seoul, but withdrew his application after discovering his *sinbun* status embedded on the government register records submitted with his application.²² Chang and others like him supported the movement throughout its history.

Thus, non-*paekchǒng* activists and wealthy or intellectual *paekchǒng* joined forces to launch and develop the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement; this diversity eventually gave rise to friction among association members in later years.

The foundation of the society was enthusiastically welcomed by *paekchǒng* communities nationwide. About three weeks later, over 400 leaders of *paekchǒng* communities, mainly from southern regions, gathered to celebrate the society's foundation in Chinju.²³ Among them were well-known leather traders, owners of slaughterhouses, and butchers from major cities. In the wake of the celebration in Chinju, numerous branches opened in other major cities, mainly in Kyǒngsang, Chǒlla, and Ch'ungch'ǒng provinces. According to Japanese records, the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa had twelve regional headquarters and 67 local branches in 1923–24.²⁴ The number of branches expanded over the years, peaking in the early 1930s (see Table 11.2). This increase in branches reflected a vitality in membership unprecedented among social movements at the time. Although the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa's official claim of 400,000 members is probably inflated,²⁵ its size and ability to mobilize active and potentially supportive members throughout the country during the long period of Japanese colonial rule was unmatched. In fact, Japanese documents, which grossly underestimated the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa's organizational capacity, credited it with 7,681, 9,688, and 7,439 members in 1926, 1928, and 1929, respectively.²⁶ Its success in the 1920s and the early 1930s reflects the dynamic social circumstances surrounding the *paekchǒng* and their organization, including the social constraints and enabling conditions described above.

The *paekchǒng* and their sympathizers focused on social and economic injustices. As noted earlier, urbanization and colonization and the transition from a traditional to a modern society created enormous social and economic tensions for the *paekchǒng*, even in the 1920s. Regardless of their economic achievements, however, they still faced strong resistance when they attempted to enroll their children in public schools, and, if enrolled, the children suffered from their schoolmates' scorn. The Ipchang incident in 1924, which was caused by a protest among non-*paekchǒng* students against *paekchǒng* in the classroom, followed by a six-week conflict between non-*paekchǒng* and *paekchǒng* villagers, is one example of this.²⁷ Therefore, high on the agenda of the national and local organizations were

Table 11.2
Number of Hyŏngp'yŏngsa Branches, 1923–35
 (1923 = 100)

Year	Number	Index	Year	Number	Index
1923	80	100	1930	165	206
1924	3	104	1931	166	208
1925	9	23	1932	161	201
1926	30	162	1933	146	183
1927	50	88	1934	113	141
1928	53	91	1935	98	123
1929	162	203			

SOURCES: The figures for 1923 are from Chōson sōtokufu, *Chōsen no gunshū* (Seoul, 1926), p. 183. The survey appears to have been conducted between late 1923 and early 1924. All other figures are from Chōsen sōtokufu, *Keimukyoku, Saikin ni okeru Chōsen chian jōkyō* (1933, 1935).

access to public schools and the eradication of ostracization of *paekchŏng* students. Hyŏngp'yŏngsa members also met obstacles when seeking to join in public activities and use facilities available to ordinary citizens. For instance, when a *paekchŏng* ran for town council in Kimch'ŏn, fierce opposition from villagers forced him to withdraw his candidacy.²⁸ For *paekchŏng*, gravesites remained segregated, participation in local meetings was prohibited, and discriminatory customs remained. Despite fierce protests, *paekchŏng* had great difficulty ridding themselves of the despised appellation.

An external impetus to *paekchŏng* organization was no doubt the establishment of the social movement sector throughout the country following the March First movement.²⁹ The historical experience of massive nationwide protests in 1919 stimulated Koreans to organize in order to address political and social discrimination at local and national levels. Such protests led to changes in colonial policy and energized activists to launch a diverse set of social mobilization campaigns, capitalizing on the new policy of "Cultural Rule." These "professional" social movement activists at the national and local levels came from wealthy families and had higher educations, at least in the early 1920s. They were leaders in a general cultural movement that aimed to transform colonized Korea into a modern society. With their support and active participation, the *hyŏng-*

p'yǒng movement rapidly became one of the main social movement groups in the 1920s and 1930s.

The movement's fortunes, of course, fluctuated. Within a year of its foundation, factional dispute erupted among the leading members, ostensibly over the location of the national headquarters. Some considered Chinju too far from Seoul to serve as the headquarters of the society and urged relocation to a more central site. Chinju leaders who had launched and led the society objected that the situation was not yet ripe for such a move. However, the controversy over the location of the headquarters masked more important differences over leadership and strategy.³⁰ Leaders of the Seoul faction, who came mostly from central Korea and had intellectual backgrounds, were obviously discontented with the Chinju leaders. The Chinju leaders still controlled the national movement, but most of them were from *non-paekchǒng* or wealthy *paekchǒng* backgrounds. In addition, although members of both factions hoped to abolish social discrimination against the *paekchǒng* and to establish an egalitarian society, the leaders of the Chinju faction stressed enlightenment of members through education, whereas the Seoul group was more interested in economic issues associated with traditional *paekchǒng* trades. As a result, Chinju leaders advocated establishing night schools and a publishing firm, and Seoul leaders sought to establish a leather firm, protect slaughterers' wages, and promote corporative sale of members' products. Such divergences cast the Chinju leaders as "moderates" and the Seoul leaders as "progressives."

The factional dispute resulted in a split national leadership and headquarters. Although the annual national convention of 1925 was co-hosted by the two groups in order to paper over the split, their conflicting views continued to affect the movement. For instance, the Seoul leaders, who assumed the national leadership after the 1925 convention, reunified the movement by emphasizing economic issues and closer contact with other social movements. Accordingly, Hyǒngp'yǒngsa members began to join other social movements at the national and the local levels, and when national concerns such as flood relief and Japanese control of newspapers arose, Hyǒngp'yǒngsa leaders mobilized their members in support. Meanwhile, other groups such as peasant, labor, and youth movements supported the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa's drive against social discrimination. *Paekchǒng* problems often rose to the fore at regional and national

meetings of groups such as the Chosŏn Youth League and Chosŏn Labor and Peasants League.³¹ Thus, the *hyŏngp'yŏng* movement became a major force in the national social movement sector.

Reunification of the national leadership and the successful establishment of the social movement sector encouraged the geographical spread of the *hyŏngp'yŏng* movement and an increase in the number of local branches. With this, subgroups for youth, women, and students emerged between 1924 and 1928. Even though their character varied widely, from the Chŏngwidan (Righteous Defense Unit), a small militant unit, to the Hyŏngp'yŏng Youth League, a national organization of youth, these subgroups energized the movement as a whole.

The Chŏngwidan, launched in 1925, aimed to protect members and the organization against external attacks. Young leaders active in several local branches led the group, but how long it endured and how widely it spread remain unknowns. In contrast, the Hyŏngp'yŏng Youth League, which first appeared in 1924 in Chinju, rather quickly sponsored several local branches, although no systematic network coordinated them. Despite the diverse character of local branches, however, the league provided a unifying social network for young members as a whole. It became the largest subgroup within the Hyŏngp'yŏngsa, with over 25 groups cited in newspapers, and the parent organization proceeded to found regional organizations in some provinces in 1926. Apparently, their effective and varied campaigns, such as unofficial schooling for Hyŏngp'yŏngsa members, proved attractive and encouraging to rank-and-file members. Another major subgroup, the Hyŏngp'yŏng Student League, launched in 1925, consisted of members' children who were enrolled in public schools. Considering the powerful barriers to *paek-chŏng* access to public education, the league was an important outcome of the *hyŏngp'yŏng* movement. When the organization visited local areas and campaigned for the enlightenment of members and the education of their children, local members applauded and collected funds for their activities.³² These three subgroups were able to launch nationwide organizations and received the endorsement of and support from the national headquarters. Numerous other subgroups arose in various local branches such as in Kunsan, North Chŏlla province, in Kanggyŏng, South Ch'ungch'ŏng province, and in Chinyŏng, South Kyŏngsang province, with specific goals like

temperance, thrift, and support for women and children. Such narrowly focused groups failed to expand or develop national bases. Nonetheless, they show that Hyŏngp'yŏngsa rank-and-file members, while autonomous and diverse in local focus, sought to improve their social life and the lot of particularly deprived groups, such as children and women. Indeed, the development of such subgroups with diverse purposes was the source of Hyŏngp'yŏngsa's energy and success in the latter part of the 1920s. Some subgroup leaders were promoted to key positions in executive committees at the national headquarters in the late 1920s and early 1930s. As a result, relatively younger leaders gradually came to share national leadership with the professional, relatively older activists who had initiated the movement.³³

To be sure, relations between the two generations were not always harmonious. They particularly clashed over the issues of future direction and strategy. Younger leaders leaned toward the radical ideology of socialism, particularly attractive at the time among social movement activists, whereas older leaders were relatively less radical in terms of political orientation and sought mainly to retain their indigenous identity. Despite such divergences and conflicts, however, they continued to share national leadership and focus on human rights as a primary issue of the movement, at least until the end of the 1920s.

The *Hyŏngp'yŏng* Movement in Search of Human Rights

The Hyŏngp'yŏngsa was the longest-lasting social movement under colonial rule, and its activities fluctuated over time in terms of strategy and political stance, depending on internal and external circumstances. Throughout its history, nonetheless, it consistently protested social discrimination against and stigmatization of *paekchŏng*, and fought to abolish all unequal treatment based on *sinbun* conventions. Its efforts explicitly and implicitly championed an egalitarian society that respected the divine human dignity of all members, and thus clearly distinguish the Hyŏngp'yŏngsa as a human rights movement.³⁴

The constitution of the Hyŏngp'yŏngsa, passed at the inaugural meeting in 1923, stated the aims of the association as "the abolition of classes and of contemptuous appellations, the enlightenment of

members, and the promotion of mutual friendship among members."³⁵ This message of basic human dignity also resounds in the first sentences of the declaration establishing the society in Chinju in 1923: "Equity is the basis of society, and love is the essential idea in the human mind. Therefore, we want to overthrow unequal social classes, to put an end to contemptuous appellations, and to enlighten people. Thus, we, too, will become truly human beings. This is the main principle of the association."³⁶ The issue of equity repeatedly appears in the statements and agenda of meetings at local and national levels. For example, soon after the Chinju meeting in May 1923, the local branch at Kimje in North Chōlla province issued a similar statement: "[We seek] to recover our rights, to regain our liberty, to escape from repressive institutions, to abolish traditional customs, to dismantle national discrimination, and to put an end to contemptuous '*paekchōng*' appellations, so that we can build our history in a fresh form and construct our life in a form of truth, goodness, and beauty."³⁷ To realize these goals, Hyōngp'yōngsa members began collective protests against social "superiors" who used the appellation "*paekchōng*" as an insult in conversation. Members of some branches resolved to abandon their traditional hairstyle, a key symbolic expression of their inferior social status in the Chosŏn period. National leaders successfully demanded that government officials efface all indications of *paekchōng* status in government registers.³⁸

The concept of human equality in the *hyōngp'yōng* movement was not confined to individual rights. From the beginning, Hyōngp'yōngsa programs were designed to improve human dignity by instilling a sense of communal fellowship among *paekchōng*. Its constitution promoted enlightenment, mutual friendship, and righteous behavior among members.³⁹ Clearly the movement's conception of human rights was communitarian, attributing to all members a common responsibility to improve the life of their fellows. This tempering of the pursuit of individual freedom with community responsibility as constituents of human dignity made the Hyōngp'yōngsa's concept of human rights socially constructive.⁴⁰ Members considered education the key to human dignity and therefore placed it foremost on the agenda at local and national meetings. When new school terms began, movement leaders campaigned to enroll members' children in public schools. Many local branches also ran night schools for illiterate members. Members were urged to read news-

papers and magazines to enhance their commonsense and general knowledge. The organization attempted to publish its own journal several times, although with little success due to severe Japanese censorship.⁴¹

Two mutually reinforcing circumstances of the *paekchǒng* community facilitated support and friendship among Hyǒngp'yǒngsa members. One was the traditionally strong community bonds forged over a long history by the circumscribed choices available for occupation and marriage. The other was the fear that industrialization and urbanization might gradually lead to the disintegration of their community. Though long isolated from the broader society, even the *paekchǒng* community felt the drastic changes affecting it. Change compelled them to reaffirm their group identity and solidarity, already perceived as a treasured tradition. This did not entail pride in the demeaning *sinbun* status of their ancestors; rather, it meant valuing their tradition of caring for their fellows, especially the deprived, as the foundation of a worthwhile group identity.

Reinforcement of group identity helped overcome the social divisions arising from increased economic differentiation within the community. Despite such differentiation, all members of the *paekchǒng* community sensed their shared social and economic vulnerability and need to promote group solidarity. Economic cooperation was reinforced as they witnessed the gradual loss of exclusive privileges in their traditional industries. Even though different economic priorities initially fostered factional disputes, as noted above, once the national leadership shifted to the Seoul faction, economic cooperation among members accelerated. The national headquarters mounted programs to found a leather firm, promote the collective sale of products, and improve slaughterhouse working conditions, especially through a regular salary system and minimum wage. Later projects included plans to seek direct management of slaughterhouses and regain ownership of hide-drying firms forcibly appropriated by Japanese residents after Japanese intervention in the industry.⁴²

This focus on economic interests and activities gradually transformed the group into a sort of trade union movement, especially in the late 1920s. Members in some areas sought to form trade unions for slaughterers and to promote close relations among butchers. Their demands for improved working conditions and an increase in

meat prices often resulted in industrial protest actions. Such actions in local branches drew attention from colleagues in the national headquarters as well as at other branches. National headquarters often dispatched delegates to support local members in trouble.⁴³ The economic focus also transformed the Hyöngp'yöngsa's conception of human rights. At the national convention in September 1926, delegates passed a resolution restating the aims and policies of the movement: "Our basic mission is to improve human rights, which requires improving economic conditions."⁴⁴ This emphasis on economic concerns, however, aroused severe antagonism among opponents in the broader community. Conservatives mounted attacks on the *hyöngp'yöng* movement itself and on its members. On some occasions, they organized violent raids on villages of Hyöngp'yöngsa members, at times over several days, devastating the villages and causing members to flee. These attacks often generated defensive support from Hyöngp'yöngsa colleagues nationwide.⁴⁵

The Yech'ön incident, the harshest attack in the history of the *hyöngp'yöng* movement, is a case in point.⁴⁶ It occurred in August 1925, just after a meeting commemorating the foundation of the branch. At the meeting, a non-*paekchöng* speaker insensitively argued that social discrimination against the *paekchöng* had been an inevitable historical phenomena, inciting *paekchöng* members in the audience. Although the meeting ended as scheduled with the restoration of order, some incensed non-*paekchöng* town residents, briding at the "insult" to the non-*paekchöng* speaker, mobilized an attack on the office of the Hyöngp'yöngsa branch and its members' village. Local police made no attempt to curb the violence, and the riot lasted more than a week. Several casualties resulted, some requiring urgent transport to facilities in a larger city for emergency operations, and one Hyöngp'yöngsa member died from injuries six months later.

Confrontations between supporters of the *hyöngp'yöng* movement and their opponents transpired in numerous cities and towns across the country, incited by diverse causes. Among the 110 incidents reported to the national headquarters from 1923 to April 1926 (see Table 11.3), 52 were caused by members' reactions to social discriminations practiced by the (former) *yangban* class and commoners. Thirty-three were ignited by government officials' discrimination, and ten by schoolchildren's contemptuous verbal abuse of members'

Table 11.3
Immediate Causes of Incidents, 1923 to April 1926

Causes	No.
Discrimination by the upper class	28
Discrimination by officials	33
Discrimination by "commoners"	24
Discriminating language against pupils	10
Economic issues	15
TOTAL	110

SOURCE: Hirano Shoken, "Chōsen kohei undō no kogai," *Jinruiai*, no. 2 (May 1927): 221.

Table 11.4
Discrimination Against Hyōngp'yōngsa Members, 1923–35
 (n = number of incidents)

Year	n	Year	n	Year	n
1923	17	1928	60	1932	31
1924	10	1929	68	1933	26
1925	14	1930	67	1934	27
1926	14	1931	52	1935	27
1927	44				

SOURCE: Chōson sōtokufu, Keimukyoku, *Saikin ni okeru Chōsen chian jō-kyō* (1933, 1935).

children. Also notable are fifteen incidents caused by economic conflicts with ordinary people. In all, such confrontations reflected members' growing view that the injustices fostered by traditional conventions had to be redressed. The variety and number of confrontations between Hyōngp'yōngsa members and their opponents increased sharply in the late 1920s (see Table 11.4). Members refused to perform humiliating acts of deference to government officials, who continued to use disparaging language toward them, and resisted officials' expectation of "gifts" or bribes as well as discrimination against their children in schools. In addition to social issues, economic grievances also increasingly ignited confrontation. In particular, the organizational efforts of the Hyōngp'yōngsa to regain

their monopoly over inherited industries fostered tension with restaurant managers, who needed a constant supply of meat, and non-*paekchǒng* slaughterhouse managers, who were imperiled by strikes mounted by working members of the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa.

In short, the increased antagonism between 1927 and 1930 reflected overall changes in society wrought by modernity as well as the spread of new human rights values. Such internal and external social and economic changes abetted the demands of Hyǒngp'yǒngsa members for equal human rights and their protest against all customs and conventions perceived as unjust.

A Setback for the Human Rights Movement

As we have seen, the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa rapidly expanded geographically and fostered the formation of vital subgroups. Moreover, it promoted the concept of human rights among members, encouraged members to resist unfair status conventions much more vigorously than ever, championed communitarian fellowship through an enlightenment campaign, and urged mutual protection of *paekchǒng* economic interests against external intrusion. Despite its broad success during the 1920s, however, the movement started to stagnate in the first years of the 1930s and to deteriorate rapidly in the mid-1930s, losing sight of its initial goals. Finally, it changed its name to the Taedongsa (Fusion society) in 1935 and lost its character as a human rights movement. The donation of a warplane and ammunition to the Japanese war effort by association leaders suggests a swing toward overt collaboration. Meanwhile, the pursuit of economic interests through exclusive rights in the leather trade was abandoned in the face of Japanese militarism.⁴⁷

The decline of the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa as a human rights movement was closely related to its historical and social context. External situations, especially shifting relations with Japanese colonial powers, were of profound influence. In its incipient stage, when the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement effectively pursued its original goal of liberating the *paekchǒng* from discriminatory conventions, activities focused on making Korean society egalitarian, at least ostensibly. Japanese colonial authorities saw no need to intervene in such activities in the first few years and enjoyed the confrontations among the Korean people. Hyǒngp'yǒngsa leaders did not denounce the Japanese but obeyed the law. Also, they benefited at times from the Japanese pol-

icy of nonintervention, which helped them, among other things, get marks distinguishing *paekchǒng* removed from government registers.

However, the reality of colonial rule could not but affect the *paekchǒng* along with other Koreans. From the beginning, a nationalist vein ran through the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement because of its genesis during the patriotic upswing of the March First era. It was natural, therefore, that it resisted both unfair Korean social conventions and Japanese colonialism. Some leaders openly opposed the occupation and attempted to harmonize nationalism with their fundamental focus on *paekchǒng* human rights. The Koryŏ Revolutionary Party affair provides concrete evidence of a strong nationalist element in the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement. Key leaders of the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa joined leaders of the Ch'ōndogyo (Heavenly way—a descendent of the Tonghak), a nationalist religious organization, and the Chǒngūibu (Righteous government), a Manchurian-based organization that sought Korea's independence, to launch a nationalist organization in 1926. The clandestine organization was uncovered by Japanese police in 1927 within several months after its foundation, and key members were detained. Hyǒngp'yǒngsa leaders involved in the affair consequently could not carry out their duties, and national leadership shifted from the older professional activists with a nationalist bent to younger radicals with a socialist orientation.⁴⁸

This reshuffling brought younger socialist leaders to the fore and had an enormous impact on the course of the movement, particularly from the late 1920s to the early 1930s. The younger leaders, previously active in the subgroups, radicalized the movement. The dissolution controversy of 1931 provides clear evidence that socialist influence in the *hyǒngp'yǒng* movement grew in the late 1920s and early 1930s, although its historical background is admittedly complex.⁴⁹ As in the case of the Sin'ganhoe (United front for independence), the proposal to dissolve the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa probably originated with the Comintern. Most of the younger generation of socialist-inclined Hyǒngp'yǒngsa members at central headquarters actively endorsed the proposal. Even before this, however, socialist agendas had begun to color Hyǒngp'yǒngsa activities. Examples are proposals advanced at the national meeting in 1928 for the protection of wicker and slaughterhouse workers and for close cooperation with other social movement organizations. Socialist influence on the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa grew stronger during the dissolution controversy.

As in the Sin'ganhoe, the socialists' call to dissolve the Hyŏngp'yŏngsa was based on the claim that bourgeois leaders controlled the movement and exploited their proletarian fellows. Therefore, they urged that the Hyŏngp'yŏngsa be dissolved and replaced by trade unions so that proletarian members could better pursue their interests.

A distinct division among leaders as well as rank-and-file members arose over the dissolution proposal, reflecting both a generational gap and differences in political ideology. Older members who had struggled to establish and develop the association generally opposed the proposal, whereas the younger leaders supported dissolution. Heated debates over dissolution dominated the *hyŏngp'yŏng* movement at the local and national levels throughout 1931. When Suwŏn branch members passed the first resolution to dissolve the local Hyŏngp'yŏngsa in the spring of 1931, their fellows in other towns such as Yangyang, Kangwŏn province, and Ipchang, South Ch'ungch'ŏng province, endorsed the decision.⁵⁰ In contrast, members in other towns such as Wŏnju, Kangwŏn province, objected to the proposal. The Yesan branch in South Ch'ungch'ŏng province proposed that a definitive decision would be deferred until the national meeting in Seoul, and this proposal was adopted.⁵¹ The dissolution proposal was, of course, the most hotly contested issue at the national conference in Seoul in April 1931. Tension first arose during the election of the national leadership. The older, founding leaders, who opposed dissolution, prevailed, prompting the faction supporting dissolution to leave the conference hall after alleging improper handling of the vote. The dissolution proposal was subsequently rejected by the remaining delegates without debate.

Nevertheless, the issue remained on the agenda of both local and regional meetings throughout most of 1931. At the South Kyŏngsang and Kangwŏn regional meetings in May and July 1931, respectively, socialist members unsuccessfully raised the resolution for dissolution.⁵² Ultimately the dissolution proposal was rejected by rank-and-file members as well as the founding leaders. Their experience of social discrimination and isolation from the broader society prompted them, regardless of ideology, to prefer the continued existence of the Hyŏngp'yŏngsa to ensure group survival.

Despite its apparent resolution, the dissolution controversy had an enduring impact on the *hyŏngp'yŏng* movement. Ideological differences among the leaders, especially between the younger socialist

radicals and older founding moderates, continued to plague the movement. Attempts to repair the split invariably failed, abetting a rapid decline in the activism and number of members and local branches (see Table 11.2). The ninth and tenth annual national conferences in Seoul in April 1932 and 1933 were attended by only about 110 delegates from some 40 branches, a dramatic decline from the 220 delegates from 58 branches in 1928 and the 230 delegates in 1930.⁵³ Rank-and-file members, especially wealthy ones, seemed gradually to withdraw support. Typical was Yi Sŏngsun's ineffective stewardship as head of the national executive committee. Yi, a wealthy Pusan leather merchant, was elected to the post at the national conference in April 1932. He presumably was expected to remobilize the resources of wealthy members to remedy financial difficulties and membership inactivity, especially in the South Kyŏngsang province area. Yi, however, refused to serve, and disappointed leaders at the national headquarters passed a resolution to remove Yi, citing his ineffective leadership at the national executive committee meeting in July 1932.⁵⁴

The emergence of radicalism and the consequent split in the national leadership was a great disappointment and even embarrassment to rank-and-file members, who at the time were weathering the effects of the Great Depression. Accordingly, many local branches ceased to be active, and the drop in membership dues consequently hampered efforts to maintain previous levels of vigor. In the end, what proved fatal to the movement, however, was the intervention of Japanese colonial authorities, who dismantled and transformed the movement into a collaborationist group.⁵⁵ The so-called Hyŏngp'yŏng Youth Vanguard League affair occurred in 1933. Over a period of months, the police arrested and interrogated more than 100 Hyŏngp'yŏngsa members, mainly younger activists, on the charge of organizing an unlawful clandestine association for the purpose of forming a communist society.⁵⁶ After several months of detention without trial, many were released, but 68 were prosecuted. Although all 68 were pronounced guilty at preliminary examinations, only fourteen were formally tried on charges of organizing an illegal association, the Hyŏngp'yŏng Youth Vanguard League. The defendants were released from jail in November 1936, nearly four years following their arrest, after a Japanese judge found them innocent.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, a resolution was passed at the national convention in April 1935 to change the name of the organization to the Taedongsa.

National leadership passed to the moderates Yi Söngsun and Kang Sangho from South Kyöngsang province. With the change in name, the preoccupation with human rights was replaced by a focus on economic interests, such as retaining traditional privileges in industries like leather and butchering. This fostered collaboration with Japanese colonial powers and the final betrayal of Hyöngp'yöngsa, once one of the most successful human rights movements in Korean history.

Conclusion

The *hyöngp'yöng* movement, the longest-lasting nationwide movement under Japanese rule, was enabled and constrained by the social conditions under which it labored. The *paekchöng*, its beneficiaries, were social pariahs under the rigidly hierarchical *sinbun* structure. Industrialization, moreover, deprived them of their traditional monopoly over certain industries, threatening to place them under the economic control of non-*paekchöng* and to destroy their community solidarity. However, social constraints were complemented by factors that enabled the *paekchöng* to develop an effective social movement. Among these were a long history of strong community fellowship, increasing exposure to the concepts of human rights, liberation from oppressive social traditions, and a proliferation of economic resources for some. These factors also facilitated the geographical expansion of the organization and its development of various subgroups.

The Hyöngp'yöngsa was primarily a human rights movement, and as such it undertook activities designed not only to abolish externally imposed social discrimination against the *paekchöng* but also to enhance the sense of human dignity within the community by re-establishing the sense of communal fellowship that had been attenuated by industrialization. Although plagued by internal division and ideological compromise as well as external intervention, the *hyöngp'yöng* movement was successful in fighting collectively against social discrimination to achieve equal human rights. It helped topple the discriminatory *sinbun* structure and thus bring Korea into the modern era as a society of equals. It is no historical accident that, in sharp contrast to the situation of the Japanese *burakumin* or the Indian untouchables, the descendants of the *paekchöng* are not discriminated against.

Hyǒngp'yǒngsa efforts, however, inevitably invited hostile reactions from conservatives and intervention by the Japanese, who feared nationalist and socialist influences. Ideological rift fostered factional divisions, undermining group solidarity, and Japanese surveillance proved particularly inimical in the movement's final years. During the Taedongsa period, the association forfeited its initial focus on human rights and fell into passivity, disappearing without a trace in the 1940s. Even after liberation from Japanese rule, the *paekchǒng* failed to reconstruct their original community, partly because of the Korean War in the 1950s and partly because of the rapid industrialization in the 1960s. The conference of the P'yǒngusa (Equal friends society) in Seoul in 1964 was probably the last meeting of the offspring of Hyǒngp'yǒngsa members.

Examination of the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa movement reveals the complexity of colonial modernity. On the one hand, colonial industrialization undermined the economic base of the *paekchǒng*. On the other hand, colonial modernity facilitated modern social movements such as the Hyǒngp'yǒngsa that pursued the removal of social discriminations. A stress on the binary of exploitation and resistance cannot capture the complex nature of colonial modernity, which requires a more flexible approach.